

**Remarks of the Honorable Jonathan J. Rikoon, Member of the United States
Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad
Dymer Mass Grave Memorial Dedication Ceremony
September 14, 2011, Dymer Jewish Cemetery, Ukraine.**

First, let me acknowledge the presence with us today of Philip Carmel, Executive Director of the Lo Tishkach Foundation; Lev Shpilsky, Executive Director of VAAD, the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine; members of the Dymer administrative council; local citizens and teachers; the designer of this and several other memorial plaques, and Matt Stafford of the U.S. Embassy in Kiev – I am honored to join you here today.

Nearly seventy years ago, in November 1941, 120 Jews, most of the remaining Jewish residents of Dymer, were shot by the invading Nazis. For the past seven decades the remains of these Jews have been in an unmarked mass grave near this location. The German unit that murdered them, Subdivision 3k4a, had a busy day that November 7. Earlier the same day, 385 Jews were killed by the same unit in Hornostaypil, and they shot another 30 Jews and partisans in Oster as well.

What happened that day in 1941 was an atrocity that must never be forgotten. The men, women and children who were executed and buried nearby were victims of systemic state terrorism that still echoes today. Indeed, the Nazi genocide of the Jews of Ukraine in hundreds of towns and villages changed the face of this country forever.

Now let me tell you why I am here today.

The United States of America is a nation of immigrants; almost all of our people came from somewhere else. (My own great-grandfather came to America in 1904 from within 200 kilometers of here.) This means that many sites that are part of the ancestral cultural heritage of our population are in other countries. The Government of the United States, therefore, has a substantial interest on behalf of its citizens in the protection and preservation of these sites.

In 1985, our government recognized a particular problem with the protection and preservation of cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Central and Eastern Europe related to citizens who were Jewish: Most of the Jews of the region were expelled, killed or fled during the Holocaust. Many who survived and initially remained in their countries later left because of post-war pogroms and Communist repression. The consequence was that the people who would otherwise have cared for the sites were no longer there.

The problem was especially serious in the case of burial places. Human remains and burial places are sacred in perpetuity in the Jewish religion. There is no ground more hallowed than a cemetery. But even after the Nazi destruction, atheist Communist authorities were insensitive to preservation of religious sites. Burial sites were developed

for other purposes or allowed to deteriorate. As an example, the cemetery where we stand today was largely abandoned, overgrown and desolate. Few of the original markers survived.

Therefore, in 1985 the United States government established a Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, on which I am privileged to serve, in order to help protect and preserve cemeteries, monuments, and cultural sites in Central and Eastern Europe associated with the heritage of Americans. The sites are not limited to Jewish-related sites, but Jewish sites are a major focus.

As part of its mission, the Commission negotiated a bilateral agreement signed by the Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Minister of Ukraine in the presence of the Presidents of both governments (Clinton and Kravchuk) in 1994, and it has contacted Ukrainian authorities regarding threats to numerous specific sites over the years since then.

When we in America think of the brutality, terror and genocide of the Holocaust, we think of the concentration camps that Germany established throughout Europe for Jews and others the Nazis thought undesirable, to use them as slave labor, and to murder millions of them. But, here in Ukraine, the Nazi plan for the annihilation of the Jews of Europe was begun by German troops who rounded up people and horrifically killed them, and often buried them in unmarked shallow mass graves, on the spot. One and a half million Ukrainian Jews were killed in this way, men, women and children, elderly and young alike.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad several years ago conducted a field survey of Jewish-related sites in Ukraine and identified approximately 500 Holocaust mass graves in the country, along with cemeteries and synagogues.

A year or two ago, the Lo Tishkach Foundation, which is a joint initiative of the Conference of European Rabbis and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, sent researchers to Jewish mass graves and cemeteries in the Kiev Oblast and identified many that needed to be marked, properly memorialized, protected, or preserved. Their work complemented similar efforts by VAAD under its program known as "Memory of Holocaust."

The need at many of the sites was memorialization. These include unmarked mass graves of Jews shot by German Nazi execution squads as part of the Final Solution, as happened here in Dymer. Proper memorialization expresses our respect for the dead and our refusal to forget the evil slaughter.

Because of uncertainties about the exact location of the mass grave today, this memorial is in the cemetery which is the final resting place of the Jews of Dymer. The

project has included restoration of the cemetery, clearing up the site and removing the overwhelming vegetation which was taller than a man's head.

The U.S. Commission has undertaken responsibility to arrange for the funding of the needed restoration and commemoration work at many of the sites identified by the Lo Tishkach Foundation. I am proud that my law firm, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, has agreed to fund the restoration work and the monument here in Dymer. The implementation of this work and this dedication ceremony is a joint project of Lo Tishkach and VAAD. Let me give special recognition and appreciation to Project Coordinator Yana Yanover, who unfortunately was unable to join us today.

Last Sunday, when I left New York, was the tenth anniversary of an event that served as a wake-up call to many in America and throughout the world. The only sights and sounds all day on radio and television were memorials to that traumatic event. The unprovoked terrorist attacks on innocent civilians on September 11, 2001, brought to American soil for the first time a small fraction of the mass murder of innocents that took place in Europe during the war. I will never forget watching from my office window in Manhattan as the burning towers collapsed like a stack of pancakes in a cloud of black dust. Painful as the attacks were for Americans, they cannot be compared to the enormity of the Nazi Holocaust.

But the fanatics who perpetrated the unprovoked attacks on civilians on 9/11, like the Nazis before them, have an existential, irrational and indelible hatred for Jews. Unfortunately, violent, indeed vicious, anti-Semitism and other racism and extremism remains alive and in some senses flourishes notwithstanding the lessons of the Holocaust. Let us hope we all remain vigilant in fighting this rabid hatred and the terrorism it brings in its wake.

Last week's Torah reading tells us that we may not forgive or even forget – "lo tishkach" – the nation of Amalak. That is the prototype for mindless anti-Semitism, for attacking the weakest, most defenseless victims merely because of their religion, and for hatred with which, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of the United Kingdom tells us, compromise is impossible because it is not based on any rationality or facts. Unfortunately, Amalak reappears throughout history, clothed more recently in the swastika and other terrorist garb.

Thank you all for your commitment to honoring and recognizing the dead and protecting their resting place. I am proud to have been able to support this project, and again I thank the Lo Tishkach Foundation and VAAD for their surveys, for the design and fabrication of this monument, for this dedication ceremony, and for bringing this project to the attention of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Aboard.